



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

August 1, 2003

Dennis Snook, Chair
Northeast Tri-County Health District Board of Health
PO Box 270
Colville, WA 99114

Dear Mr. Snook,

Thank you and the members of your board of health as well as Mayor Anderson, Carol Villers, Ed Gray, Jim Matzuyama and the City of Colville and Northeast Tri-County Health District staff for hosting the state board at the Colville City Hall for our meeting last month.

Mayor Anderson's description of the transportation system challenges in your region, its air quality impact and the partnership between local agencies and the state departments of transportation, health and ecology to address it was very enlightening.

Thank you for taking time to come before us personally to share your insights about your board's priority areas of concern. I really enjoyed the opportunity we had for a freewheeling and constructive discussion.

We were impressed by the attention your board members, both past and present, have devoted to balancing the public's desire for essential services with their sense of being overwhelmed by tax burdens. Please be assured we heard the admonition to consider carefully the cost to the taxpayers along with the public health benefit of any new regulation or policy we might consider. The stories we heard about the financial burden for cities and for ratepayers of compliance with new sewage standards will be with us as we consider changes to our on-site sewage system rules in the coming year.

We heard loud and clear that what may be essential in King County may be the essence of disaster in Colville.

We also heard that the principles of state regulatory reform are important: keep it simple, don't make a rule when common sense will do and remember that rules always cost someone something; is it worth it? We will carry these admonitions with us as we consider changes to many of our rules in the coming year that directly affect local public health jurisdictions and the community enterprises you regulate using them. However, please be assured that we will not shrink from our duty to maintain vigilance in the continuing struggle for resources and regulations adequate to protect the public's health.

We appreciated hearing of your concern about dwindling state and local resources to perform many of the most basic functions of public health, such as environmental health regulation. We will be thinking about that when new rules are proposed to us on water recreation and when enforcement issues arise on matters such as drinking water and sewage system operation and maintenance.

The discussion on access to needed medical care in your rural communities was very helpful for the board. Affordable and geographically accessible care is an extraordinary challenge in your area. We will keep that in mind as we regard with alarm state government's apparent view that access to medical care in rural areas, for the poor and for certain racial and ethnic minorities is not a sufficiently high priority to maintain at historic levels given our economic downturn and dire state financial circumstances.

On a more positive note, we will rely the gratitude you expressed at our meeting that the state's health budget placed a relatively high priority on the work of local public health jurisdictions. We share your gratitude, and are all relieved that more serious reductions in public health funding did not occur during these very tough economic times. Let me also congratulate you on your excellent and experienced staff's ability to recruit and retain a highly qualified public health workforce. This is truly a rare achievement in rural public health agencies in our state.

I want to say a special note of thanks for the very moving presentation we received during the noon hour from Nancy Foll, Family Services Director of the Rural Resources Community Action Network, about the hidden epidemic of domestic violence and abuse and its implications for health care and other societal costs.

Our talk with you and your staff was very helpful to our ongoing efforts to learn more about community perspectives on public health issues. As I mentioned during our discussion, we intend to use the information we received from you and other Boards of Health in our 2004 State Health Report. By law, the state Board must produce this report biennially, together with recommendations for state health priorities for the ensuing biennium. You can see the 2002 State Health Report on our website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/sboh/Pubs/2002SHR.pdf>

If you would like to provide additional information, other community perspectives or other suggestions for statewide health priorities, please feel free to call or write. We will be accepting additional input from local boards of health for the state health report until September 30, 2003. We are open to hearing from you about emerging issues at any time.

If you have any further questions or requests, please call the Board office at (360) 236-4110 and one of our staff would be happy to assist you in anyway possible.

Again, thank you for allowing us some time with you in your busy schedule.

Sincerely,



Linda Lake, Chair
Washington State Board of Health

cc: Northeast Tri-County Health District Board of Health Members
The Honorable Robert Anderson, Mayor of Colville
Carol Villers, Administrator, NE Tri-County Health District
Washington State Board of Health Members
Don Sloma, Washington State Board of Health